by Andrew Selley

We are living in strange times when many are calling themselves apostles and prophets of God. The great challenge for the church is to properly discern those who are genuine from those who are false. The Bible warns us of a great increase in deception, specifically mentioning a great increase of false prophets within the Church (see 1 John 4:1-6, Matthew 7:15, 2 Peter 2:1, 2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

Jesus teaches us that “false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect (Matthew 24:24). Today, all over the world we are seeing people rising up and calling themselves prophets of God, so it is vital that we properly weed out the false from the true.

Signs and accuracy don’t always equal authenticity
Many modern prophets claim that their supernatural powers are proof that they are indeed the real thing, but clearly, miraculous powers are no measure to use in the light of scriptural warnings. ‘Prophets' make people eat snakes; pour boiling water on congregants which ‘miraculously’ does not burn; and I even saw one so-called prophet drive a car over his followers, which somehow did them no harm. Many of these 'prophets' will only minister or perform signs if they are guaranteed prescribed amounts of money from those who want to receive their blessing.

We must note that the Bible teaches us that they will come claiming to represent Christ (Matthew 24:5, Luke 21:8). Just because they call themselves Christians or claim that Jesus is their Lord, it is not evidence that they are indeed the real thing. These false prophets will “come to you in sheep’s clothing” (Matthew 7:15) which means they will seem like true Christians in their language and actions. They will say “hallelujah” and “Jesus is Lord!” and will outwardly worship God and do other Christian things. We must also make clear that miracles and detailed, accurate prophecies are no proof that they are indeed representing the Lord.

In Acts 16:16-17 we see a woman prophesying accurately that: Paul and Barnabas were servants of God; the Christian God is “the Most High God”; and their message accurately proclaimed “the way of salvation.” Acts explains that she had a “spirit of divination” and did not prophecy by the Holy Spirit. What should be concerning is that everything she said was right yet Paul wisely recognised she was a false prophet.

Discerning false prophets
We should learn from this and ensure that the prophets among us are authentic. The Bible teaches that we will know the true from the false by their fruit (Matthew 7:15). We are able to test through the discerning of spirits (one of the spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12) and through perceiving their inner motives. We need to be able to recognise those who are false by discerning that they “inwardly are ravenous wolves” (Matthew 7:15). Let me explain.
If we look carefully, we will say that their gift is being used to serve their own hunger or need ("ravenous wolves"). Their own need for recognition, honour and praise will be their motivation. They will not come primarily to freely serve, but will want seats of honour and power. They will lord it over people and love the fame that their gift gives, rather than being willing to serve without praise or recognition. They may, like the woman in Acts 16:15, prophecy for money. Instead of prophesying to serve the church freely (as Christ gave freely), they will demand a charge and so ‘serve’ for financial gain. Whether the church decides to bless them financially or not will make no difference to the authentic prophet. It will be their absolute joy to freely serve God’s people with their gift.

Another giveaway that we learn was that this woman was continually “shouting” (Acts 16:16-17 NIV). Shouting itself was not the problem; it was rather the continual drawing attention to herself. False prophets have a root of flesh in which Satan uses for his own purposes to keep the focus on man. When we become solely aware of the person and their gift, then we are watching a prophet drawing attention to themselves rather than pointing in awe and wonder to the Lord. Of course, true prophets can also have areas of immaturity and insecurity, but they will always point people to Christ.

**Receiving the authentic**
The Bible warns that many false prophets will emerge before Christ’s return, therefore we should not simply accept every prophet because they are accurate. We must look deeper to see fruit and heart attitude. We must also not go to the other extreme and reject every prophet or deny the real gift, simply because some have perverted it.

My prayer is that our churches will rightly receive every genuine prophet whom the Lord sends, while rejecting those who they find are false. It is in this way we can rightly build upon the authentic prophetic office and ensure our churches’ foundations remain properly built upon the cornerstone of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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